

Indigenous Amazonia at the Millennium: Politics and Religion
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ABSTRACTS

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Guesting, Feasting, and Warfare in the Northwest Amazon

Relations between groups may change both by gradual slippage and by abrupt rupture. Through ritual, however, relations between groups can change through “authorized revision.” The poali, a ritual practiced by sibs in the northwest Amazon of Brazil and Colombia, articulates Eastern Tukanoan interpretations of historical relations of guesting, feasting, and warfare. In it, two agnatic descent groups engage in ceremonial insult and mock warfare, recalling antagonisms of a prior period and defining alliances in the present. The discourse is a reflexive model through which local groups locate themselves vis-à-vis their neighbors and outsiders. The language and ritual brings groups, formerly distanced, into social proximity, as the ritual is a vehicle for reinventing relations.

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Place is the Space: Rethinking Memory and Embodiment
in Native Amazonian Death Rituals

Insights from the emerging “anthropology of place” suggest new directions for exploring connections among several major themes in native Amazonian ethnology. Notions of nature and culture, ecology and ethnobiology, alterity and perspectivism are grounded in native peoples’ relations to place and the social, temporal, and spatial processes through which places become loci of cultural meanings and individual experience. Understanding how memory and embodiment intersect in place-experience helps illuminate indigenous practices of burning or transforming sites pervaded by the presence of the dead. In western Brazil, Wari’ death rites illustrate the cultural management of emotions through processes of emplacement and displacement.

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Animism as Cannibalism: Relations of Consumption Among the Guajá Indians

Animistic and cannibalistic beliefs are closely linked in the religion of the Tupi-Guaraní speaking Guajá Indians of Maranhão, Brazil. In the Guajá animistic world view, all forest life is classified as kin, and specifically, as siblings. Eating of forest “kin” is seen as necessary for the passage of plant, animal, and environmental features from the mundane world to their sacred celestial home. Thus, consumption is not just a physical act, but a social and religious act.

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Aesthetics and Politics in Chilean Mapuche Autobiographical Shamanic Discourse

This paper will examine the configuration of aesthetics and politics in Mapuche shamanic autobiographical discourse. Specifically, this paper will discuss the envisioning of the sacred and most beautiful as it is expressed in the shamanic narratives in the creation of ethical and ethnic definitions. The ethnographic material consists of 38 shamanic narratives from 12 shamans recorded at social gatherings, rituals, and in informal conversations. These autobiographical narratives are grouped under three types of discourse: narratives of shamanic initiation, narratives of individual suffering, and in their role of peumafe or dreamers, narratives of communal suffering. Central to all these narratives are the descriptions of the shamanic journeys to heaven where the shamans receive their knowledge and power.

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Prehispanic Rituals, Alignments, Roads and Power in the Bolivian Amazon

A landscape-scale network of formal raised earthen causeways and canals covers the savannas of the Baures region in the Bolivian Amazon. These earthworks, now dated to the late prehistoric and early colonial period, are attributed to the Bauré, an Arawakan-speaking group known for their complex socio-political organization. Although primarily constructed to facilitate transportation and communication between communities located on forest islands in the seasonally inundated landscape, the number, size, formal design, and patterning of these earthworks suggests additional ritual and socio-political functions. The archaeological earthworks of Baures can be understood in

reference to historical and ethnographic descriptions of formal roads and rituals in the Amazon and Andes. I argue that the formal network of roads and canals is a landscape expression of architectural monumentality. The formal roads and canals map a complex socio-political organization that may have been based on heterarchy rather than hierarchy.

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Hierarchy, Political Economy, and the “Other” Within: Symbolic Foundations of the State in Amazonia

This paper explores the nature of political power in Amazonia. The case study of the Upper Xingu provides the point of departure for a critical reexamination of the traditional view that Amazonian societies lack(ed) institutional social hierarchies or developed supra-local political economies. Specifically, while appropriate in a variety of contexts, arguments stressing autonomy and equality in their conceptions of the person or society, i.e., positing a powerful resistance to the concentration of power (hierarchy) and denying the political dimensions of economy, fail to grasp the full range of cultural variability in the region. Ethnographic and oral historical evidence from the Upper Xingu is used to show (a) how an idiom of hierarchy, not equality, underlies most social relations, (b) how social actors are differentially transformed (constructed) based on the symbolic and ritual objectification of this hierarchy, and (c) how weighty actors, those who can accumulate a surplus of symbolic resources or capital (a ‘fund of power’), transform these into economic capital (wealth) and labor, thus providing the basis for a truly political economy. Further, many Amazonian societies are justifiably characterized as atomistic, autonomous, and defining and reproducing themselves socially through symbolic opposition or alterity to outsiders (human or not). Xinguano communities, on the other hand, are socially and symbolically defined and reproduced not only in terms of such and existential contradiction, but in terms of a structural contradiction formed by definition of society into upper (elite) and lower segments (a minimal definition of class-divided societies or the State). Considered historically, Xinguano society is neither atomistic, autonomous, nor egalitarian but regional, plural, and hierarchical: it is integrated through diffuse social relations, a network of elite exchange, and a social philosophy that requires co-participation in core ritual elements of social reproduction, most notably tied to major life-crisis rituals affirming past, existing, and future chiefly individuals and, thus, existing social hierarchies. Archaeological evidence from the Upper Xingu is used to extend these observations into Amazonian prehistory. The paper concludes that, if we modify our definitions of the body in Amazonia to include a fuller range of cultural variability, past and present, and the State, conforming to Amerindian ‘perspectives’ and not the definition

imported from Western historical experience, then the artificial and a-historical exclusivity of body and State in Amazonia—the foundation of much regional anthropology—will begin to erode away.

Stephanie Huelster
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Changes in Social Identity with Regard to Intravillage and Transnational Relationships Among the Waiwai of Guyana

The Wai Wai of southern Guyana are experiencing an accelerated interaction with a variety of persons and situations that are having a net effect on their social identity. Ways in which village members exercise an elegant social manipulation of persons, both within and outside the community, offer insights regarding Wai Wai ideals of personhood and interaction. These ideals are present in transforming village social systems, allowing for the retention of a core of Wai Wai identity in the face of potentially massive community disruption and change. Ideas concerning the bodily experience of power, personal autonomy and the incorporation of “new” types of persons and situations demonstrate not only local manifestations of globalizing processes, but how new forms of connection and exclusion highlight the mutability of indigenous systems for accommodating these activities.

Jean Jackson
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Colombia's Indigenous Communities and the Civil War

This paper describes the impact of the nation-wide violence in Colombia on the indigenous communities of the Amazon region. Emphasis is on the current situation in Amazonas, Putumayo, Caquetá, Vaupés, and parts of Guaviare. An overview of the region is followed by an analysis of the major actors (both armed and civilian, both local and from the exterior), and the most widespread effects, including displacement, recruitment (forced and voluntary) into guerrilla or paramilitary organizations, economic disruption (including increasing involvement in production of illegal drugs), terrorist strategies, and physical damage resulting from defensive maneuvers and open combat.

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Alcohol, Worms and the Purged Body: The Politics of Ritual and Medicinal Practices of the Ecuadorian Awá

Excessive alcohol consumption is a regular feature at curing ceremonies of the Awá, an indigenous people residing in the littoral lowlands of Ecuador. In a population with a high rate of parasitic infections, the traditional medicinal practices of the Awá—and especially the high levels of alcohol consumption—are interpreted as providing an anthelmintic mechanism for controlling and reducing the presence of the round worms regularly found in Awá bodies. Comparing traditional ritual practices to modern chemotherapy, this paper reasserts a hypothesis that emphasizes the medical significance of traditional curing practices. By exploring the politics of ritual and medicinal practices of the Awá in the context of increased contacts and influences from the outside, particularly increased alcohol consumption, the paper calls attention to a range of negative and positive (ironic) medical results, and to questions that remain unanswered.

Kenneth M. Kensinger

Being a Headman: In Memory of Grompes

Grompes was the headman of Balta, the largest of the Cashinahua villages on the Curanja and Purus rivers of Southeastern Peru, from 1960 until his death in 1999, a period characterized by many changes in traditional society brought about by the influx of missionaries, bilingual education, traders, and representatives of the national government. In this essay, I examine these changes in part through Grompes' reflections on the joys and headaches of being a headman.

Eduardo O. Kohn
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The Aesthetic and the Immediate: Poetic Engagements and Ecological Knowledge Among the Runa of Amazonian Ecuador

When talking about forest experience the Quichua-speaking Runa enlist their poetic dexterity in a conscious—albeit quixotic—attempt to erase the mediating and distancing effects of language in order to make the felt immediacy of just being in the forest palpable to their listeners. The phenomenological “aesthetic of the immediate” that emerges from this process encourages the Runa to see speech not as a means of representing the biophysical world but as a way of accessing it. By positing that nature-knowing emerges in the process of evoking a sense of lived engagement with the

environment, the Runa approach provides an alternative to the current competing claims in Ecological Anthropology—that natural histories accurately reflect nature’s “real” structure and that they are socio-culturally determined constructions.

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A Language of Dreaming: Dreams of an Amazonian Insomniac

In the course of a series of psychoanalytic interviews conducted on the banks of an Amazonian igarape, a lively old Parintintin woman, wife of a chief, acknowledges and comes to terms with her lifelong insomnia. When she sleeps, she is plagued with anxious dreams; and her dreams take her back to her childhood as the daughter of a prominent chief and to memories of the strife between her parents. The way she talks about her dreams illustrates how Parintintin cultural beliefs may facilitate the communication of dreams and introspection on them, but may at the same time intensify anxieties over the dream.

This paper explores the cultural context of psychoanalytic understanding of dreams: How are dreams shaped by the dreamer’s cultural beliefs about them and ways of interpreting them? How are they affected by the social uses the dreamer makes of them?

The paper also examines our relationships with those we work with in the field, especially the separation that occurs when the anthropologist leaves at the end of field work. This separation may be compared with the termination of an analysis, except that it has to do with factors extraneous to the relationship itself. This issue has been occasionally broached in anthropological literature—for example, in Crapanzano’s *Tuhami*—but it has not been adequately discussed.

George Mentore
University of Virginia

Waiwai Transitions II or the Glorious Tyranny of Silence

The broad question we have asked ourselves has to do with the effect of change upon an indigenous system of absencing when confronted by the modernity of “Being as Presence.” In what ways would an Amerindian tradition of the political and religious be transformed when in contact with the modern desire for autonomous subjectivity? How does the transformation influence Amerindian self awareness, body, and social personhood? By focusing on the

Waiwai concept of ekatī (vital essence), case studies illustrating Waiwai bodily experience of power and the making of social identity, we will limit ourselves modestly to the domain of what could be called the interpretation of the “floating symbol.”

Maria del Carmen Moreno

“Contrasting Lives and Shared Vision: William Brett and John Peter Bennet Among the Lokono of Guyana”

I propose to explore the legacy of William Brett, an Anglican priest and the founder of Kabakaburi, and J.P. Bennet and Anglican Canon of Kabakaburi who wrote the English/Arawak dictionary, and their contribution to Arawak/Lokono culture and tradition. I am interested in how this legacy projects Brett and Bennet as icons and symbols of men of faith. Furthermore, I wish to explore the image that portrays them as instrumental—through their actions, publications, and work—in the “preservation” and “dissemination” of Lokono culture/tradition. I am also interested in how this image (legacy) surfaces in daily conversation and particularly in conversation with outsiders in other settings (rural, urban, and international).

Donald Pollock
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Western Amazonian Ethnoregionalism

Western Amazonia has been the site of intensive interethnic communication for at least several centuries. One consequence of this relatively high level of interaction among indigenous communities is the portage of cultural practices across language groups, undercutting comfortable associations of language and culture, and laying the foundation for future ethnotyping of the sort that has characterized the Upper Xingu and the Rio Negro/Northwest Amazon regions. This paper explores this historical process, focusing on the Aruan Kulina and their penetration into western Amazonia, and their interactions with other groups, including Arawakans and Panoans, as well as interactions with representatives of Brazilian and Peruvian national society.

Mary Riley
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“The Politics Behind Cultural Productions and Indigenous Voices: Conflict and Consensus Among the Makushi Amerindians of Guyana”

In this paper I will present a few of the conundrums inherent in several aspects of Amerindian identity, as defined and constructed by non-Amerindian (mainstream) Guyanese society, within Guyanese Amerindian society and within the Rupununi District of Guyana. In a cultural context wherein several competing (and contradictory) notions of “what it is to be Amerindian” exist, different themes marking Amerindian life and culture are performed at public events. Some of the public events are the “culture shows” performed in Makushi villages; other public events include theatrical productions depicting Amerindian culture for consumption by mainstream Guyanese society in Georgetown.

Clayton and Carole Robarchek
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Grief and the Witch-Killer’s Rage:
Religion and the Explanation of Waorani Emotion

The authors analyze a complex of grief, rage, and homicide among the Ecuadorian Waorani, tracing the relationships among Waorani world view, values, concept of self and homicidal violence, especially witch-killing. The analysis demonstrates that, at least in this case, individuals’ experience of the emotion of rage is not a thing sui generis but, rather, is part of a specific definition of experience within a particular cultural construction of self and reality.

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Marubo Demographic Politics

By comparing census data from 1974-75 with data from 1997-98, this paper shows that Marubo village leaders have had differing levels of success in producing demographic prosperity and proceeds to investigate the causes of that inequality. Some leaders were found to have lost personnel, others broke even, while some leaders’ villages grew considerably. This production of inequality results from differing levels of success on the part of leaders who are consciously endeavoring to be unequally successful relative to their peers. In this paper, I explore the causes of inequality in Marubo society by seeking an explanation for the disparities in demographic growth evident in the census data. I conclude that control over postmarital residence of coresidents and access to valued relations with non-indigenous people are the main explanations for the production of demographic inequality among Marubo villages. These findings highlight the substantial difference between Marubo society on the one hand, and on the other hand the model I field-tested, namely

Clastres' model wherein the "intrinsic impossibility of competition" and "the prohibition of inequality" are essential features of Amazonian social organization. Quite the contrary, Marubo society has what Rivière and Mentore call a "political economy of people" in which political competition surrounds the construction of demographic inequality.

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Fine Lines: The Interface Between Indigenous and Caboclo
Narrative Traditions in Today's Amazon

The differences between Indians and caboclos would appear to be very clear in much of the present-day literature on Amazonia, and, indeed, in practice, these divisions are sometimes unmistakable. However, and above all in the act of storytelling, the lines between the two may also be profoundly blurred. In this paper, I look at a series of small communities on the Rio Negro during September 2000. Individual stories of underwater cities (the Encante) and of their resident enchanted beings and caboclo legend). The ease with which particular storytellers blend these elements, and the varying roles which these stories play within their own lives, suggest that the processes of narrative transformation may be as strong and as real as those of cultural loss.

Arthur P. Sorensen
Independent

The Northwest Amazon: La Voragine Revisited

Or, the plight of a naïve anthropologist-linguist caught among proprietary missionary groups holding political authority. Why, in Northwest Amazonian Spanish, does "linguista" now mean Missionary? This paper is a reconstruction and recapitulation, as originally perceived in the field, of the cycling of lengthy eras of controlling missionary groups, and of their determinative correlation with *linguae francae*: Tupi, Tukano, Portuguese, Spanish—English? Partially surveyed are coincidental stages of linguistic description and orthography. The presentation of this paper is in terms of Jose Eustacio River's novel, *La Voragine*.

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The Religion and Politics of Anthropology in the Amazon:
A Critical Analysis Focused on the Yanomami and Ye'kuana

To what extent is there any validity and utility in viewing anthropology as a religion? If there is any, then what are the political implications? For the health of Amazonian anthropology, societies, and ecosystems, such matters require continual critical analysis and reflection in order, among other things, to improve research paradigms, methods, and practices. Different approaches to doing anthropology among the Yanomami and Ye'kuana in the Brazilian and Venezuelan Amazon are compared and contrasted in historical perspective on the basis of a literature review as well as the author's previous publications, fieldwork, and current role as a consultant to Otro Futuro in Venezuela. The paper concludes with some considerations about the possibilities and limitations of doing anthropology in the Amazon in the future, including ethnographic futures research.